

MADISON CAPITOL TIMES

GUEST COLUMN

OBEY TRIES TO GET GOP SUPPORT TO END WAR

By: BILL KAPLAN
20 November 2007

Last January, President Bush decided to escalate the Iraq War by sending more troops. Bush did this despite an electoral repudiation of the war, misgivings of the U.S. military's Joint Chiefs of Staff and the advice of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. Now the White House claims that the escalation is working and is a "return on success." But what are the facts?

Despite lower U.S. military deaths in the last few months, 2007 has been the deadliest year for U.S. troops since the war began. So far the war has cost the United States more than 3,800 dead, including 81 Wisconsinites, and more than 28,000 wounded.

Iraqi civilian and military dead number in the tens of thousands. Iraq remains a devastated society. More than 2 million Iraqis have fled the country.

Furthermore, the Washington Post reports: "Senior (U.S.) military commanders (in Iraq) now portray the intransigence of Iraq's Shiite- dominated government as the key threat facing the U.S. effort in Iraq, rather than al-Qaida terrorists, Sunni insurgents or Iranian- backed militias."

Moreover, President Bush's rationale for sending more U.S. troops was to give the Iraqi government "breathing space it needs to make progress in other critical areas." But

there has been no political reconciliation between Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis.

The United States remains mired in an Iraqi civil war with no end in sight.

What to do?

Fortunately, Wisconsin Democratic Rep. Dave Obey, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, has taken a leading role in Congress to end the Iraq War.

Elected in 1969 at the height of the Vietnam War, Obey has never forgotten the lessons of that misbegotten tragedy: Presidents can be wrong or don't always tell the truth, and Congress can set limits on the size, scope and duration of war.

Obey doesn't take guff from sanctimonious opponents or delusional supporters of the Iraq War. He strives to work with GOP colleagues and get their votes. For example, the House voted 377-46 to require the Bush administration to come up with a "comprehensive strategy for the redeployment of United States Armed Forces in Iraq."

The bill did not specify a withdrawal timeline or an implementation requirement. But the hope was to move away from partisan confrontation and pick up GOP votes.

Obey, fellow Wisconsin Democratic Reps. Steve Kagen and Ron Kind, as well as Wisconsin GOP Reps. Tom Petri, Paul Ryan and James Sensenbrenner all voted yes. Wisconsin Democratic Reps. Tammy Baldwin and Gwen Moore voted no. President Bush did nothing.

What next?

President Bush has asked for nearly \$150 billion in new spending for the Iraq War.

Obey led the House in passing an alternative, giving Bush \$50 billion, but "conditioned upon the president agreeing to a policy that declares our intent to end our participation in the civil war in Iraq by the end of 2008."

In a 218-203 vote all Wisconsin Democratic representatives voted yes and all Wisconsin GOP representatives voted no. Later, most GOP senators voted to kill Obey's proposal by filibuster despite opposition by Wisconsin Democratic Sens. Russ Feingold and Herb Kohl.

Obey will keep trying to get GOP support to end the Iraq War.

Kaplan, a UW graduate, lives in Washington, D.C.